Hemirtal-14

James opened his eyes to the room in bright with sunlight. He didn't remember closing them. There had been the message telling him he'd been playing too long, a blip of dark and now light. Too many things were wrong. For one thing, he was confident it hadn't been twenty hours yet. If he'd been kicked out, he should see the inside of the pod, not the rough-hued exposed beams holding up the ceiling. He didn't remember what the foam bed in the pod had been like, but he was sure it wasn't the lumpy hay under him now, and he also thought there was too much sunlight streaming in from the open windows.

The immediate conclusion was that whatever kept the logout button from being visible to him had prevented him from waking up inside the pod. Considering his only alternative to not being active in the game was the empty space he'd been in when he died. Four minutes there had been boring, four hours would have been deadly.

He got out of the large bed feeling none of his usual morning drowsiness, but he craved his tea. He sniffed himself and didn't smell sweaty or dirty. At least he didn't have to worry about locating a washing machine or showers.

Downstairs, Osborn was behind the bar, drying a mug with a rag, like he'd done the whole time James had been there and not interacting with the NPC. Hadn't the programmers given him a routine; a schedule establishing where he'd be at different times of the day? He couldn't remember one roleplaying game that didn't have at least that for their NPCs.

"Morning," James called.

"Good morning," Osborn answered, pausing in his wiping and looking at James. "Can I offer you some breakfast?"

"What time is it?" James asked instead. "How long was I out?"

Osborn walked to the window and looked at the sky. "It's got to be five hours past sunrise."

"You sure?"

Osborn returned to the bar. "Can I offer you some breakfast?"

"Right, limited responses." Was he hungry? He called up his interface and couldn't find a hunger bar. He didn't feel hungry, which was odd. He'd had breakfast before the job, and had planned for a late lunch after it was done, so he hadn't eaten anything in twenty-four hours at least. He didn't think the virtual meal had done anything for his body, no matter how good it had tasted.

Did the pod cut him out completely from his bodily sensations?

On the one hand, it meant he wouldn't feel the need for bathroom breaks, but on that same hand, the inside of the pod was going to be a mess when they pulled him out. Hopefully, he'd regain consciousness well outside of it.

But on a general level, the lack of sensation from the body couldn't be safe for a player. What if a fire happened?

"Okay, sure, a fire in a house." He chuckled. When had been the last arson? A decade ago? There were so many safeties in place now, a house was probably the safest place to be

in. Still, was the pod set up to deal with medical issues?

Maybe his lack of sensory information was caused by the same thing that kept him from having a logout option. Maybe the same thing was responsible for him being out for so long.

Osborn was wiping the mug again. What had been the last thing he's said?

"No thanks, I'll pass." He had things to do today. Well, two of them, no three. "Where's the closest show that will buy clothes?" He needed to empty his bags and get gold in the process.

"The tailor is at the town center," Osborn answered, and James hurried out. He gained a handful more shirts, pants and skirts, on the way there, from convincing the people he met.

James almost walked out as soon as he entered the shop on being greeted by the shopkeeper.

The man was tall, thin, dressed in bright, clashing colors, swished as he walked across the room to greet James, and—this was when James nearly turned and ran—had a lisp when he spoke.

"Welcome to my shop," the man said in a high falsetto as he looked James over with an appraising smile. "How can I, Hmmm, dress you today?"

James was going to find whoever had programmed this NPC and strangled them for putting together all the worse stereotypes of flamboyant gay men into one character. He thought they were done with this kind of attitude, but clearly, someone hadn't gotten the memo. How had quality control let this slip through?

Reminding himself it wasn't the NPC's fault, James sold him the clothes he'd accumulated for thirty gold, with some haggling, and left. Even the executive he'd dated for a job, years back, who'd turned out to be freaky under the straight-laced suited exterior, hadn't made James as uncomfortable as this tailor had.

He was lodging a complaint as soon as he was pulled out.

He headed for the training grounds, and got his bag back from Charles, and was pleased to find that his empty bags stacked in one of the slots. He could carry twenty-five empty bags, not that he had a way to carry them all once he put stuff in them. Still, he'd have to test if bags left out despawned after a while.

Or, that's what he'd do, is he wasn't going to be pulled out of the game in under a day or so. He could figure out how to take advantage of the game system once he acquired a pod properly.

He headed out of the town, stopping only long enough to greet the guards and try to manipulate them, as they weren't the same ones he'd met coming in, and headed for Anton's farm.

You are leaving a town. Remember that outside of towns, you can die, ensuing the usual penalties.
System note: You are currently in a tutorial area, the only death penalty applied is the time delay on respawn.

That reminded James he hadn't looked up what the penalties for dying were, so he did that while walking.

> Death comes in two forms in Hemirtal, Player versus Environment and Player versus Player

"Really helpful there. Top of the line help file." He called up the Player versus Environment. James never cared for Player versus Player. He got enough of that in the real world.

> Death in Player versus Environment situation will cause the player to lose 20% of their unspent Fame points, and a cumulative 1 minute per death spent out of active play.

That was… he thought back to the last game he'd played. Not that bad. The loss in Fame point was clearly a way to encourage players to spend them, instead of hoarding them. He couldn't lose items, and if he read this properly, he didn't need to go back to his corpse to regain them.

He looked at his Fame points, ten of them. So death would cost him two. Not horrible on a purely math level, but it seemed only quests gave them, and unlike MMO he played before, they didn't seem to be too many of them. That could be because he in the early version of the game.

Still, what could he get for ten points? Skills, he remembered that, but that couldn't be it. It took him a few permutations of the search terms before he found what he needed.

> Using Fame points
> Fame points can be used to purchase Statistic increases, Skills, and Modules slots, Modules, and Retraining Tokens.
> The cost in Fame for raising a Statistic is five-time the point to be reached. Statistics can only be increased one point at a time.
> The cost for raising a skill is the level of the skill + 5 times 1.5
> The cost for adding a Module Slot is the current number of slots, times 5
> The cost for modules is dependent on their rarity. Common and uncommon modules are automatically unlocked based on minimum requirements being met. Rare modules cost 30 Fame points, Epic Modules 40 Fame points, and Legendary Modules 50 Fame points.
> Retraining Tokens cost 100 Fame points.

James whistled in amazement. So risking Fame points was actually a thing in the game, since everything would cost a lot over time. Everything was self-explanatory, except for the Retaining Token.

Retraining Tokens allow a player to clear out all their module slots and reassign their available modules as desired. Statistic prerequisites must still be met, but prerequisited modules are only needed to unlock subsequent ones.

James saw the value in buying the tokens. It was the same cost as unlocking the twenty-first module slot, so instead, they could streamline what they already had, freeing space. They'd lose some effective skills levels, but done with care it would balance out with what other modules they would put.

He stopped, reread the description, then called up the one for the Trickster.

The trickster is an agent of Chaos, chosen for their ability to disrupt order, trick others into doing things that might not benefit them, or simply play tricks on others. Tricksters often have high social skills but are not exclusively social players.
Abilities: Anonymity, Recasting.

Recasting was the one

Recasting
Once every 24 hours, the player with this ability can redistribute all their points, re-select their modules, change the name and/or titles that are displayed. Skill can not be altered using this method. Only unlocked modules can be assigned to freed slots.

He stared. Every twenty-four hours he could do something that would cost others a hundred Fame points on top of changing his stats, name, and title. Overpowered much?

James hated that he was going to be pulled out now. Not only couldn't he imagine getting the Trickster role again when he reentered the game, but it was going to be softened. There was no way that ability was going to survive intact once players started abusing it.

James started walking again and called up his stats. He might be in a tutorial zone, but that was no reason to risk his points when he had things he could spend them on.

Statistics
Strength 0
Agility 1
Constitution 0
Charm 2
Magic 0

Such low numbers took him by surprise again, and he had to remind himself that,

unlike other games, zero was where they started. He could raise his agility to two, or strength and Constitution by one. What did the one-handed sword module require?

> Module: One-handed sword
> Rarity: Common
> Prerequisite: Strength 1, Agility 1
> Skill: One-handed sword-wielding
> Skill: blade maintenance
> Ability: Thrust: You thrust your blade into your opponent, causing a guaranteed critical (Bonus Damage). If you hit them, that is.
>
> You have one available module slot, do you wish to equip One-Handed Sword in it?
> Yes/No?

James picked yes, to test something.

> You do not meet the Strength requirements to equip this module.
> You have enough Fame points to purchase a Strength point, do you wish to purchase a Strength point?
> Yes/No?

There it was. The system checked for him. "Yes."

> You now have 0 available Module slots. Please find more quests that give module slots, or purchase them with Fame points.

Fifteen points for that wasn't going to happen in the time he had left. Should he put it in his Constitution, or keep them until… what? Unless he spent the day farming quests, he wasn't getting enough to raise anything else. He put it in his constitution.

> Constitution has been increased to 1. Hit-points are now as follows: Head: 40, Torso: 80, right arm: 20, left arm: 20, right leg: 20, left leg: 20

That was good, but he was definitely getting armor before he got into a fight.

Anton's farm was in view now, and James dismissed the interface. As with his previous visit, Anton was standing by his house, hand resting on his hoe. The field was still unharvested, and Ferdinan was nowhere to be seen. He wondered if he'd get the quest again if he asked about the field. It could be an easy Fame point if he did.

"Greetings," James called.

"Greetings, William," Anton answered. So the NPC remembered him. Would he call

everyone by name? James chuckled. Would anyone bother giving their name to him?

"I see the field's still standing; has Ferdinan run off again?"

"He wandered off this morning," Anton replied.

"Of course." James smiled. Stock reply; barely adjusted to consider he now knew the bull's name. The lack of quest momentarily surprised him, until he remembered he'd offered to go look for it before it came. "I brought you something." He took the figurine of Hendrik from his inventory and offered it to Anton.

The man looked at it, then reached for it, hand trembling. He took it and gazed at it longingly. "Thank you."

"The people in town tell me Hendrik is quite the hero, a lot of the militia is alive because of him."

Anton nodded, still gazing at the figurine. "I just—" he stopped, ran a finger over it.

When it was clear the farmer wouldn't say anything more, James prodded him. "You just what?"

Anton looked at him, seemed surprised to see him. "I wish I knew what happened to him."

James frowned. "Didn't he die protecting his men?"

Anton gave a slight shrug. "They never found his body."

"Okay, but that's normal, right? The monsters probably came back and took it."

Again, Anton gave a slight shrug. "He was the only one missing."

James opened his mouth to point out something like there had only been one, and it hadn't been back before the militia returned for the dead, but he remembered this was an NPC, and clearly, this was the setup for a quest. It was so easy to forget that with Anton, with the effort the programmers had put into his body language. Would everyone behave like him in time, or was Anton's role more important?

"Do you want me to find out what happened to him?"

The farmer looked at James, hope in his eyes. "Would you? I have little to give you in return, but if you could, I would be eternally grateful.

> You have been offered a quest by Anton the Farmer.
> Quest: What actually happened to Hendrik.
> Hendrik died protecting his unit, or so his father was told, but Anton is suspicious of the circumstances surrounding his son's death and would be grateful to you if you could investigate and tell me the truth, even if he had nothing to offer as repayment other than his gratitude.
> Reward: Special
> Accept Yes/no?

Special? He hadn't seen that as a reward yet. He accepted the quest and looked around for the green light. It appeared in the town.

"I'll look into it," James said. "I promise that I'll tell you what I find." If he could

complete the quest before he was pulled out, he mentally amended. It was easy to offer the man comfort, and he wouldn't be around to see the disappointment if he couldn't complete it.

"Now, about Ferdinan," James grinned. "Do you want me to go looking for him?" James didn't turn out rewards, especially when they were easy.